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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS, EUR/RPM
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SUBJECT: HELMAND UPDATE: NEW GOVERNOR BRINGS IMPROVEMENTS, MARINES
ENGAGE TALIBAN

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Since his arrival in March 2008, Governor Gulab Mangal has been a force for positive change in Helmand province. Mangal is a capable bureaucrat and has an excellent grasp of the political and security challenges facing Helmand. He is building a competent administration, and is determined to bring government closer to the people. The deployment of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) allowed the U.K.-led Task Force Helmand (TFH) to conduct large clearing operations in central Helmand. The Marines defeated enemy forces around Garmsir district and restored government control. Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) continue to expand and improve their capabilities but lack sufficient numbers to control all cleared areas across the province. Reconstruction and development (R&D) work has expanded, and the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and USAID regularly coordinate with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) to improve project implementation. End Summary.

Marines and Focused District
Development Improve Security

2. (SBU) Poor security remains the biggest problem in Helmand, but the deployment of the 24th MEU and 2nd Battalion 7th Marines to Regional Command South, mainly in Helmand, brought needed support to TFH and the ANSF respectively. The 24th MEU, with approximately 2300 Marines, successfully cleared enemy forces from Garmsir district, while the approximately 1300 Marines of the 2/7 are mentoring the Afghan police in five districts. (NOTE: "Marine 2/7" police mentoring efforts are being closely coordinated with the Focused District Development (FDD) police development program led by the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, as well as the In-District Reform program that complements FDD.) TFH and the ANSF conducted military operations around Gereshk, Sangin and Musa Qala and disrupted enemy forces preparing for the spring offensive. The Afghan National Army (ANA) is well received by Helmand residents and continues to improve its capabilities. The ANA played a large role in spring military operations, and can successfully backfill cleared areas in Helmand if it receives sustained mentoring from TFH.

3. (SBU) The Afghan National Police (ANP) successfully supported counter-narcotic efforts and disrupted multiple suicide attacks and other criminal activities. The PRT has eight Police Mentoring Teams working to improve the ANP's tactical, management and leadership capabilities. General Andiwal, Helmand Chief of Police, is a positive influence on the entire force, and his regular travel to the districts has improved ANP performance and image.

Development: Improved Coordination

¶4. (U) The PRT, USAID and the Afghan government improved their coordination of development projects, and began numerous new projects across the province. The town of Musa Qala received significant investment for medical, education and government buildings. Gereshk district saw expanded development activity from both the government and the PRT. USAID's Alternative Development Program operated effectively in the area around Lashkar Gah, and with improved security can expand to other areas of Helmand.

Governance: Governor Mangal Takes Charge

¶5. (SBU) Governor Mangal became governor in March 2008 (he previously served as Governor of Laghman and Paktika provinces) and quickly established himself as the dominant political force in Helmand. He immediately met with Helmand's political leadership, and stressed that his administration would improve security, fight corruption, bring government closer to the people and improve service delivery. The PRT and the Afghan government provided technical support staff to support him. The Provincial Development Committee has met regularly, and the Provincial Council has supported the Governor's outreach efforts. Mangal has improved the image and operations of Helmand's provincial government; however, at the district level, capacity is extremely weak and significant work is needed to improve it.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Governor Mangal's efforts to expand the capacity of provincial and district governance is exactly what was needed to complement the real military progress achieved by TFH, the ANSF and the U.S. Marines. Mangal has managed Helmand's complicated political strands to gain support for governance reform efforts, and he has strong backing from the central government. Security remains

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the greatest challenge to Helmand residents, but now residents have a governor who can improve their physical safety and build real support for the GIROA in Helmand.

WOOD